

Muslim Weddings: Traditions and Ceremonies

The Islamic faith is the second largest religion and while it is not specific to the Arab culture, the traditions are seen most prominently in the Middle East and in Indonesia. If you are invited to a Muslim wedding, here is what you can expect. Traditions will differ depending on culture, Islamic sect and observations of gender separation rules.



Leading up to the Ceremony

Henna Parties are held a few days before the ceremony with the bride and her closet female friends and family members. Henna is meant to not only adorn the bride, but to protect her as well.

Baths are used to cleanse and prepare the couple for marriage. Depending on the regional traditions, some brides are escorted to their purifying bath by musicians and dancers making it a festive process.

In many Muslim countries, male friends and family of both the bride and groom will meet at the mosque on the Friday after the proposal. A ceremony called a fatha is then held and prayers are spoken and arms are outstretched to thank God and to bless the fathers of the bride and

groom.

Elements of the Ceremony

- Many countries and sects require the men and women to stay separate during the ceremony and reception.
- There is no specific officiant of the ceremony and any Muslim who understands Islamic traditions may perform the ceremony.
- There is a contract called the Meher that is signed and read at the ceremony stating the monetary amount that the groom will give to the bride. There are two separate parts to the contract: An amount that is given to the bride prior to the marriage and an amount that is given throughout the bride's life. The Meher is considered the bride's security and can be used in any way she chooses.
- The marriage contract is signed at a ceremony called the Nikah. The groom states the details of the Meher in front of at least two male witnesses who both are required to sign the contract as well. The bride and groom may then share a piece of sweet fruit.
- At the conclusion of the ceremony a reading of the Fatinah, the first chapter of the Qur'an.

Hindu Weddings: Traditions and Ceremonies

Hinduism is the dominant religion in many countries like India and Nepal and with its rapid growth as the world's third largest religion, knowing the traditions of a Hindu wedding might come in handy. The Indian culture celebrates marriage as a sacrament or a sanskara, a ritual which enables two individuals to start their journey together, as one. The Hindu wedding emphasizes three essential values: happiness, harmony and growth. If you are invited to a Hindu wedding, here is what you can expect:



Leading up to the Ceremony

An engagement party known as a Mangi is held a few months prior to the wedding ceremony. This serves as a time to bless the couple and give them gifts of jewelry and clothing. The bride and her friends will have a Mehndi party before the day of the wedding. This is where the bride is adorned with intricate henna designs on her arms, hands, legs and feet. The Mehndi represents the strength of love in a marriage and the darker the color, the stronger the love is.

Elements of the Ceremony

- The ceremony is typically held on a day in the "bright half" of the northern course of the sun.
- A wedding can last for multiple days, but in an American/Hindu wedding, typically there will only be Friday night activities and an all day ceremony on Saturday.
- The wedding will typically take place outside under a canopy called a mandap. Under this mandap will be a sacred fire.
- There are many different elements to the actual ceremony:

The arrival of the Vara Yatra - The groom and his family arrive at the ceremony with much singing and dancing where they are greeted by the bride and her family.

Grahashanti - The nine planets are invoked and blessings are received from each planet.

Kanyadan - The bride is led in by a brother or an uncle. The bride's parents are waiting with the groom to offer their daughter in marriage. The parents wash the feet of the bride and groom with milk and water.

Hastamilap - The bride and groom's right hands are wrapped tightly with cotton thread. The multiple layers of it make it strong symbolizing a strong marriage and an unbreakable bond.

During the ceremony the bride and groom are seated in front of a holy fire and family members are invited to make offerings in the fire. The bride and groom walk around the fire four times and vows are spoken to validate the marriage.

Dhruvadarshan - The conclusion of the ceremony is where the priest directs the newlyweds eyes to the north star which is a constant among the shifting constellations around it. This symbolizes that the marriage will be steadfast, just like the north star.

Jewish Weddings: Traditions and Ceremonies

The Jewish wedding is one rich in tradition and symbolism. The wedding day is considered to be the bride and groom's own Yom Kippur and they will both fast for the whole day. The day focuses on the couple's commitment to each other and to the Jewish faith. If you are invited to a Jewish wedding, here is what you can expect:



Leading up to the Ceremony

The bride and groom do not see each other for one week preceding the wedding day.

Prior to the ceremony is a time called Kabbalat Panim where the bride and groom greet guests separately.

There is a tradition for the mother of the bride and mother of the groom to break a plate together which symbolizes the seriousness of the relationship.

The Badeken ceremony is where the groom and his family cover the bride's face with a veil, symbolizing his commitment to clothe and protect his wife.

Elements of the Ceremony

- The ceremony takes place under a chuppah which is a canopy. No jewelry is to be worn by the bride and groom under the chuppah because it could cause a focus on material possessions.
- The bride circles the groom seven times and the settles on his right side.
- There are two cups of wine that will be used throughout the ceremony and the first accompanies the betrothal blessings which are recited by the rabbi.
- The exchanging of rings makes the marriage official. The groom however, is the only one to give a ring. If the bride wishes to give the groom a ring it is done after the ceremony.
- The reading of the Ketubah will take place during the ceremony. This is the contract read aloud that outlines what the groom's responsibilities to his wife are. Usually the wife will display this in a prominent place in their new home.
- The second cup of wine accompanies the recital of the seven blessings.
- The famous breaking of the glass by the groom marks the end of the ceremony.
- A festive meal is held to celebrate with much music and dancing. The bride and groom are now allowed to end their fast.

Latin American Wedding: Traditions and Ceremonies

A Latin American wedding will differ greatly depending on which spanish speaking country the traditions are based in, but in general the day is colorful and very festive. Depending on the couple's religious views, many weddings have a heavy catholic influence. If invited to a Latin-American wedding, here is what you can expect:



Elements of the Ceremony

In the planning of the wedding, many are involved in helping pay the expenses. In some traditions, a bridesmaid and groomsman will be paired and are then assigned a specific portion of the wedding to pay for.

A large rosary is symbolically draped around the necks of the bride and groom. The couple will wear it for the remainder of the ceremony which affirms their unity and commitment. It is removed at the end of the ceremony.

The groom gives the bride 13 gold coins that have been blessed by the priest. This represents Christ and his 12 apostles.

The money dance is a tradition that has become more widely known around the states in the past few years. This is the part of the reception where guests are allowed to pay to dance with the bride. If you are attending a Latin-American wedding, don't be surprised by this tradition.

The Buddhist Wedding: Traditions and Ceremonies

The wedding has long been believed to be a secular affair in the eyes of many Buddhist communities, but recently it has been blessed by the monks and allows couples to hold a small affair. The ceremony will differ depending on the couple's focus which could be on Buddha, Dharma, nature, God, or creation. The ceremony is not focused on religion, but rather the couple's promise to each other to live a harmonious and spiritual life. If invited to a Buddhist wedding, here are a few things that might take place:



Leading up to the Ceremony

The couple might visit a Buddhist monk to make sure that their horoscopes are aligned and show that they are a compatible couple.

There is a traditional betrothal ceremony called a Chessian which might be held to celebrate the wedding.

Elements of the Ceremony

- The ceremony will focus on meditation and moments of silence which creates a inner peace.
- A shrine might be erected with an image of Buddah surrounded by candles and flowers.
- Refuges and precepts are repeated by the bride and groom after the officiant. It can be personal things which individualizes the ceremony.
- The bride and groom might offer up a poem or a song that shows their love for each other.
- Buddhist wedding vows are repeated out of the Sigilovdda Sutta.